

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Listing of Claims

Claims 1-42 (Canceled).

43. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus, comprising:
a plurality of image forming cartridges arranged one above another and configured to form an image on a medium; and
a transfer belt support unit, including a transfer belt, hingedly attached to the image forming apparatus at a lower end position of the transfer belt support unit and movable between a first position covering the plurality of the image forming cartridges and a second position uncovering the plurality of the image forming cartridges, wherein each of the image forming cartridges is configured to be mounted to or dismounted from the image forming apparatus when the transfer belt support unit is in the second position.

44. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 43, further comprising:

a plurality of optical writing devices arranged one above another respectively corresponding to the plurality of image forming cartridges and configured to emit light beams to the plurality of image forming cartridges so as to form the image on the medium; and
a housing holding a vertical stay, the vertical stay disposed between the plurality of image forming cartridges and optical writing devices and including slots configured to allow the light beams emitted from the plurality of optical writing devices to pass therethrough to the plurality of image forming cartridges.

45. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 44, wherein

the vertical stay is disposed substantially at a center position of the housing and separates an image forming area including the plurality of image forming cartridges from an optical writing area including the plurality of optical writing devices.

46. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 44, wherein the vertical stay has a sufficient rigidity to bear a buckling load ascribable to a weight of the plurality of image forming cartridges and optical writing devices.

47. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 44, wherein the vertical stay extends from a top portion of the housing to a bottom portion of the housing.

48. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 44, wherein each of the slots of the vertical stay substantially match in size with a scanning width of a respective light beam emitted by the plurality of optical writing devices.

49. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 44, further comprising:

a plurality of horizontal bottom plates connected to the vertical stay and disposed underneath respective optical writing devices to support the respective optical writing devices.

50. (Currently Amended) The image forming apparatus according to claim 44,

wherein:

the transfer belt is disposed adjacent to the plurality of image forming cartridges when
~~the-a~~ cover is closed.

51. (Currently Amended) The image forming apparatus according to claim 50,

wherein:

the transfer belt is configured to convey the medium to each of the plurality of image forming cartridges in order to form the image on ~~the-a~~ transfer medium.

52. (Currently Amended) An image forming apparatus, comprising:

a plurality of image forming cartridges arranged one above another, each containing a different color toner and a photoconductive drum; and

a transfer belt support unit, including a transfer belt, hingedly attached to the image forming apparatus at a lower end position of the transfer belt unit and movable between a first position covering the plurality of the image forming cartridges and a second position uncovering the plurality of the image forming cartridges,

wherein each of the image forming cartridges is configured to be mounted to or dismounted from the image forming apparatus when the transfer belt support unit is in the second position.

53. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus of Claim 52, further comprising:

a plurality of optical writing devices arranged one above another respectively corresponding to the plurality of image forming cartridges, each including at least one mirror and a light source; and

a housing holding a vertical stay, the vertical stay disposed between the plurality of image forming cartridges and optical writing devices and including slots arranged to allow light beams emitted from the plurality of optical writing devices to pass therethrough to the plurality of image forming cartridges.

54. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 53, wherein the vertical stay is disposed substantially at a center position of the housing and separates an image forming area including the plurality of image forming cartridges from an optical writing area including the plurality of optical writing devices.

55. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 53, wherein the vertical stay has a sufficient rigidity to bear a buckling load ascribable to a weight of the plurality of image forming cartridges and optical writing devices.

56. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 53, wherein the vertical stay extends from a top portion of the housing to a bottom portion of the housing.

57. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 53, wherein each of the slots of the vertical stay substantially match in size with a scanning width of a respective light beam emitted by the plurality of optical writing devices.

58. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 53, further comprising:

a plurality of horizontal bottom plates connected to the vertical stay and disposed underneath respective optical writing devices.

59. (Currently Amended) The image forming apparatus according to claim 53, wherein:

the transfer belt is disposed adjacent to the plurality of image forming cartridges when the-a cover is closed.

60. (Previously Presented) The image forming apparatus according to claim 59, wherein:

the transfer belt is configured to convey a medium to each of the plurality of image forming cartridges in order to form the image on the medium.

61. (Currently Amended) An image forming system, comprising:

a plurality of image forming means arranged one above another for forming an image on a transfer medium;

means for supporting a transfer belt, including a transfer belt, said transfer belt supportsupporting means being hingedly attached to the-an image forming apparatus at a lower end position of the transfer belt unitsupporting means and movable between a first position covering the plurality of the image forming means and a second position uncovering the plurality of the image forming means, wherein

each of the image forming means is configured to be mounted to or dismounted from the image forming apparatus when the transfer belt supporting means is in the second position.

62. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 61, further comprising:

a plurality of optical writing means arranged one above another respectively corresponding to the plurality of image forming means and configured to emit light beams to the plurality of image forming means so as to form the image on the transfer medium; and

a housing means including a means for supporting disposed between the plurality of image forming means and optical writing means, the means for supporting including means for allowing light beams emitted from the plurality of optical writing means to pass therethrough to the plurality of image forming means.

63. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 62, wherein the means for supporting is disposed substantially at a center position of the housing means and separates an image forming area including the plurality of image forming means from an optical writing area including the optical writing means.

64. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 62, wherein the means for supporting has a sufficient rigidity to bear a buckling load ascribable to a weight of the plurality of image forming means and optical writing means.

65. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 62, wherein the means for supporting extends from a top portion of the housing means to a bottom portion of the housing means.

66. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 62, wherein each of the means for allowing light beams substantially matches in size with a scanning width of a respective light beam emitted by the plurality of optical writing means.

67. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 62, further comprising:

a plurality of horizontal bottom plate means connected to ~~the a~~ vertical stay means and disposed underneath respective optical writing means and for supporting the respective optical writing means.

68. (Currently Amended) The image forming system according to claim 62, whereinfurther comprising:

~~the a~~ transfer means disposed adjacent to the plurality of image forming means when ~~the a~~ cover means is closed.

69. (Previously Presented) The image forming system according to claim 68, wherein:

the transfer means is configured to convey the transfer medium to each of the plurality of image forming means so as to form the image on the transfer medium.

70. (Currently Amended) A method of forming an image, comprising:

emitting a plurality of light beams from a plurality of vertically arranged light emitting devices;

passing the plurality of light beams through corresponding slots of a vertical stay;

receiving on each of a plurality of image forming cartridges a respective one of the plurality of light beams which have passed through the corresponding slots of the vertical stay;

forming a toner image using the plurality of light beams which have been received;

and

transferring the toner image to a transfer medium on a transfer belt housed in a transfer belt support unit including at least an upper roller and a lower roller around which the transfer belt moves, the transfer belt support unit being hingedly attached to the an image forming apparatus at a lower end position of the transfer belt unit and movable between a first position covering the plurality of the image forming cartridges and a second position uncovering the plurality of the image forming cartridges, wherein

each of the image forming cartridges is configured to be mounted to or dismounted from the image forming apparatus when the transfer belt supporting unit is in the second position.

71. (Currently Amended) The image forming method according to claim 70, wherein the vertical stay is disposed at an interior position of the a housing and separates an image forming area including the plurality of image forming cartridges from an optical writing area including the plurality of light emitting devices.

72. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 70, wherein the vertical stay has a sufficient rigidity to bear a buckling load ascribable to a weight of the plurality of image forming cartridges and light emitting devices.

73. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 70, wherein the vertical stay extends from a top portion of the housing to a bottom portion of the housing.

74. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 70, wherein each of the slots of the vertical stay substantially match in size with a scanning width of a respective light beam emitted by the plurality of light emitting devices.

75. (Currently Amended) The image forming method according to claim 70, further comprising:

moving the transfer belt, which is adjacent to the plurality of image forming cartridges when the-a cover is closed.

76. (Previously Presented) The image forming method according to claim 75, wherein said moving step comprises:

moving the transfer belt to convey another transfer medium to each of the plurality of image forming cartridges so as to form another image on said another transfer medium.